

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

Honorable Patricia W. Griffin



The Administrative Office of the Courts continues its efforts to support the Judicial Branch and the Citizens of Delaware during this very trying time of increased demands and reduced resources. I would like to highlight some of the AOC's critical work:

Self-Represented Litigants/Procedural Fairness

Since the release of the report of the Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force, the AOC has assisted in the implementation of several initiatives which further the goals of the Task Force to better serve self-represented litigants. Some of those efforts include the following:

- Development of a Spanish version of the video which was produced for self-represented litigants. The video, which is in short segments that can be viewed individually, provides a step-by-step demonstration of the various aspects of preparing a case and appearing in court. The English version is currently available on the Judicial Branch web-site. The Spanish version will be accessible through the website in FY 12.
- Additional interactive forms for summary possession have been released for use by litigants in the Justice of the Peace Court. These forms guide the litigant through a series of questions which assist with the accurate completion of the form. Several additional forms on other topics are under development and are targeted for release next year.
- The Bench Bar Committee on Limited Scope Representation, which is staffed by the AOC, released its recommendations on proposed rule changes to clarify the parameters of such representation.
- The AOC continued efforts to aggressively expand the Limited Pro Bono Legal Assistance Program which offers consultation services by volunteer attorneys in free fifteen-minute periods to self-represented litigants in Family Court. Discussions for additional expansion opportunities in partnership with Delaware Volunteer Legal Services are underway.

Mental Health and Criminal Justice Task Force

The AOC continues to facilitate the work of the Delaware Supreme Court Tasks Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Health. Implementation over the past year of the strategic plan released by the Task Force has included a colloquium for mental health providers, Crisis Intervention Team training for law enforcement officers, as well as a conference on mental health issues related to the criminal justice system.

Community Outreach

The AOC also focused on community outreach efforts in 2011.

- June 2011 saw another successful year for the Supreme Court's "From Classroom to Courtroom" project. Eleven middle and high school teachers from across the State participated in the three-day externship program offered through the University of Delaware. Participants gained detailed information about the court system which they then took back to their schools and applied to their civics curriculum. This year's program

included presentations by several members of the Judiciary, including the Honorable William L. Chapman Jr., the Honorable Mary M. Johnston and the Honorable Susan Cline. Jeff Curley, Esq., Executive Director, Our Courts, iCivics, Inc., from Georgetown University Law Center, gave a demonstration on iCivics - a web-based education program begun by retired Supreme Court of the United States Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and initiated in Delaware by Delaware Supreme Court Justice Randy J. Holland, that provides teachers with material to promote civics education.



2011 Classroom to Courtroom participants in front of Legislative Hall in Dover.

- Expansion of the youth forum for middle school students continued as well. The program provides an opportunity for students to learn about the court system by working with real life judges, deputy attorneys general and assistant public defenders in an impromptu mock trial held in a real courtroom during which each student participates by either taking on the role of one of these professionals or serving as a witness or juror.
- The Summer Youth Program, brain child of the AOC's Manager of Support Services Robin Jenkins, continued to expand with 49 students enrolled this summer. The program, which began in 2009, has more than doubled in size since its inception three years ago. Through the program, student participants from the foster care system and others receive invaluable work experience and learn new skills that they can apply to school and everyday life.
- Other efforts included participation in the Delaware high school mock trial program and assisting in promoting the iCivics program in Delaware.



Summer Youth Forum students participating in a mock trial



Collections

The AOC's Office of State Court Collections is working on implementing a new automated collections system. Automated kiosks will be installed at certain locations that will accept cash as well as credit/debit cards to allow Delawareans to make payments at these kiosks.

Grant Writing

This year saw increased participation by the AOC in coordinating grant request initiatives to support the Judicial Branch and the citizens of Delaware.

- The AOC prepared the courts' application to the Council of State Governments to participate in the Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) Mental Health Court Curriculum Pilot Site Program. The program offers technical assistance in developing a curriculum for best practices for the Mental Health Courts. Delaware was selected, on a competitive basis, to participate in this effort during FY 12.
- The AOC also took the lead in preparing the request for BJA funds to support, among other things, the Court of Common Pleas' efforts to expand the Mental Health Courts to Kent and Sussex County as well as funding for training for mentors involved with the Delaware Veterans' Treatment Court in Kent County.

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Racial and Ethnic Diversity

- In September 2010, Delaware was selected as one of four states to receive a \$24,000 two-year Racial Justice Improvement Project (RJIP) grant sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the American Bar Association, as a part of the ABA's program to support state criminal justice systems in efforts to enact key practices to promote fair, efficient and accountable systems. The Delaware RJIP initiative is led by Supreme Court Justice Henry duPont Ridgely, with task force members including the Honorable Alex Smalls, Chief Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, among others, and is staffed by the AOC. Delaware's RJIP task force's approach is two-pronged. First, steps are being taken to ensure that racial disparity does not play a role in cases in which a criminal defendant is charged with a violation of probation (VOP). Efforts completed include adopting bias-free decision making policy and training requirements for probation officers. Additional training and changes to DOC's automated data collection system to allow for automated tracking of graduated VOP sanctions are planned for the second year of the grant. Second, the task force is working with the Criminal Justice Council on implementation of CJC's Declaration of Leading Practices to Protect Civil Rights and Promote Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Criminal Justice System. The Declaration, adopted in April 2010, outlines steps to be taken by courts and criminal justice agencies, in a variety of areas, to ensure civil rights and racial and ethnic fairness.
- Providing language access services to the courts continues to be a main focus for the AOC, including coordination of translation of important court forms and expansion of interpreter services being provided through the AOC.

Continuity of Operations Planning

The Judicial Branch was one of the first entities to have completed the State's Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) requirements. Information continues to be updated.

Court Security/Facilities

Numerous security aspects to the New Castle County Courthouse were worked on in FY 11, including upgrades to the back entrance gate of the Courthouse. Additionally, the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee requested the U.S. Marshals to survey security operations at the Courthouse and to provide recommendations for future security planning. Those recommendations will be available in FY 12.

Technology Management and Support

Following the completion of the civil phase of the COTS automated civil case management system, the Supreme Court adopted a modified governance structure for technology in 2010 through a revision to Supreme Court Administrative Directive 176. That approach, called the Delaware Courts Automation Project (DCAP), represents a change from the earlier COTS project approach. A key feature of DCAP is that it leverages existing technology to enhance and modernize the trial courts' criminal case management systems, as well as the Family Court civil case management system. DCAP's goal is to improve the Courts' ability to manage their caseloads and to serve the needs of the public and the Bar; to enhance information sharing capabilities across Courts and agencies; to streamline court processes and procedures; and to capitalize on state-of-the-art technologies as a means of gaining court operational efficiencies. The AOC, through its Judicial Information Center, has a critical role in many aspects of DCAP implementation.

The AOC continues to work to enhance its service-oriented approach for technology to better meet the Courts' needs. FY 11 has been a period of retooling as we refocus our efforts in serving the needs of the judiciary. Website enhancements, support of new technological devices, development of a new technological approach to address the Court of Chancery's guardianship accounting needs, and e-filing support, represent a few of our priority areas for FY 11.